

1. Examining a Relic (ဓာတ်တော်မွေတော် စစ်ဆေးပုံ)

"စစ်ကိုင်းတောင် သမိုင်း" - ရွှေပြည် ဦးဘတင်း

မန္တလေးမြို့၊ မန္တလာဘုမ္မိစာပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ (သက္ကရာဇ်) ၁၂၉၇။ စာမျက်နှာ ၂၁။

--- ဟံသာဝတီ၊ သက္ကရာဇ် ၉ ရာစုနှစ် အစပိုင်း၊ ဘုရင် မင်းတရားလက်ထက်တွင်ဖြစ်သည် ---

"တရံရောအခါမင်းမှာ ဝက်အမြဲတေရသည်ကို၊ မွေတော်စစ်ဟုရတနာပန်းတောင်းနှင့် အရိုအသေကိုးကွယ်သည်။ ရှင်တိသာသနဇေ နန်းတော်သို့ ဝင်ရာတွင်၊ ရတနာပန်းတောင်းနှင့်ပြသည်ကို၊ လက်ဝါးပေါ်တွင်တင်၍သာ ကြည့်သည်ပူဇော်တော်မူ။ မင်းကလည်း ဆရာတော်မယုဟုအမှတ်ရှိ၍၊ ဓိဋ္ဌာန်တော်မူလျက် ဥသျှောင်တော်မှာ နားစေသည် ရတနာပန်းတောင်းမှာလည်း နားစေသည်။ ထိုသို့ပြခိုက်ဝယ် ဆရာတော်က၊ ပကာရေသွင်းခဲ့စေမိန့်တော်မူ၍၊ ပကာရေသွင်းခဲ့သည်တွင်၊ ဝက်အမြဲတေကို လက်ဖြင့်ဆုပ်ထားပြီးမှ ယခင်ကနည်း ဓိဋ္ဌာန်စေ၍ လက်ကိုဖြန့်သော်၊ ဓိဋ္ဌာန်ရာသို့ မသွားဘဲ၊ ပကာရေသို့ ဆင်း၍ နေလေသည်။ သည်အကြောင်းကို မြင်ရာတွင်မှ၊ မွေတော်မဟုတ်၊ ဝက်အမြဲတေဖြစ်သည်ဟူ၍ သိကြသည်။ ကိုးကွယ်တော်မမူသင့်၊ တန်ခိုးရှိသောဝတ္ထုဖြစ်၍ အဆောင်အရွက်သာပြုတော်မူသင့်သည်ဟု ဆရာတော်လည်း မိန့်တော်မူ၏။ (အမြဲတေ ဆိုရာမှာ အမတေပင်) ထိုအကြောင်းကိုစွဲသဖြင့် ထိုကစ၍ မင်းအဆက်ဆက်စေတီပုထိုးတည်မည် ဓာတ်တော်မွေတော် ရွေးချယ်ရန်ရှိလျှင် ဇေတဝန်ကျောင်းတိုက်က ရဟန်းငါးကျိပ် မြေနန်းတော်သို့ပင့်၍၊ ဓာတ်တော်မွေတော်ရွေးချယ်စေမြဲ၊ ထုံးစံဖြစ်သည်ဟူ၍ စာဟောင်းစာတမ်းရှိ၏။"

"The History of Sagaing Hills" by Shwe Pyi U Ba Tin

Mandalay Town, Mantālābummi Publishing House, 1297 ME [1935 CE]; p.21 .

--- in Hansavadi, Burma in the mid 16th century AC, during the reign of king Mindaya ---

"One time ago there was a magical stone of pig¹ respectfully worshipped in a jewel-decorated basket [by the royalty] as a true Relic. When the ven. Tisāsanadhaja came to the palace, he was shown the jewel-decorated basket and even after putting [the magical stone] on his hand, he looked [at it] but didn't pay [it] respect. Even the king saw that the great monk [/sayadaw] didn't believe [in] it. [The king] made an *act of truth*² - "may [it] rest on the head, and [at the same time] may [it] rest in the jewel-decorated basket." When this was shown, the great monk asked that [it] be put into alcohol. When [it] was put in alcohol [the monk] held the magical stone in [his] hand and in the way of the previous *act of truth* [the great monk] released [his] hand. However, the *act of truth* was not fulfilled – [the magical stone] descended in the alcohol and stayed [there]. When this was seen they knew that [it] is not a Relic, [but it] is a magical stone. The great monk also said: "It is not suitable for worship, [however,] being a powerful object, [it] is suitable for use [for one's protection etc.]." (Magical stone means a stone used for protection.)³ Based on that incident, since then for generations of kings, if there was [a need to] select a Relic for building a pagoda, fifty monks from Zetawun Monastery were invited to the palace of the kingdom and always, as was the custom, [they were] asked to select [the true] Relic. Thus is [recorded in] available historical records."

¹ A calculus, a hard biological lump of several kinds of salt produced by an animate being or a plant (here of pig), used as a charm for protection.

² Wish that something miraculous will happen if one is correct, or to prove one's correct statement.

³ This ought not to be translated, because this just provides the reader with a known synonym for the old word.

2. Days of Past and Future, and 'Rain' in Burmese Language

The 'yesterday' word, as well as the words for the days before yesterday have several synonyms. The words for days in distant future are barely known, but still understood.

English	Old/Written Burmese	Today written	Today spoken	Offic. declaration
Yesterday	ယမန့်နေက	မနေ့က	မနေ့က	ယမန့်နေက
The day before yesterday	ယမန့်တနေ့က	တနေ့က	တမြန်(မ)နေ့က၊ တနေ့က၊ လွန်ခဲ့တဲ့ နှစ်ရက်က	ယမန့်တနေ့က
The day before the day before yesterday / three days ago	ရှေးရှေး ယမန့်တနေ့က	လွန်ခဲ့တဲ့ နှစ်ရက်က၊ ရှေးရှေးတနေ့က	ဟို(း)တနေ့က၊ လွန်ခဲ့တဲ့ သုံးရက်က	ရှေးရှေး ယမန့်တနေ့က
Tomorrow	---	မနက်ဖြန်	(မ)နက်ဖန်	---
The day after tomorrow	---	သန့်ဘက်ခါ	သန့်ဘက်ခါ	---
Three days later	---	ဖိတ်နွဲ့ခါ၊ နောက်သုံးရက် ကြာသောအခါ	နောက်သုံးရက် ကြာမှ	---
Four days later	ဆင်နွဲ့ခါ	နောက်လေးရက် ကြာသောအခါ	နောက်လေးရက် ကြာမှ	---

There is a word which is commonly used for rain, cloud, and sky.

English	Pāḷi	Old/Written Burmese	Today
Rain/cloud/sky	မေဃ (megha)	မိုပင်း [mō]	မိုး [mō]

3. Sayalay - The Lovely Masters

"Sayalay" (ဆရာလေး), one of several terms⁴ used for eight/ten-precept nuns consists of two part – *saya* (teacher, master) and *lay* (dear, lovely). I translate *lay* as lovely, because that's the way I feel the word, mainly based on occurrence of the suffix in other words: ကလေး = young child ("lovely person"), အဒေါ်လေး = "dear aunty", သတိကလေး = "dear mindfulness"⁵, အမလေး = "(oh) dear sister!" (in awe etc.). I have selected "lovely" instead of "dear", because "dear" is not as common today, used mostly in address. The meaning of "little"/"tiny" in the suffix *lay* isn't as apparent as in the suffixes ငယ် [nē] (used for animate beings) and သေး [tē:] (used for inanimate things).

The lovely masters of Myanmar have a great significance for the Buddhist society, thriving and influencing the situation of modern spiritual attitude among the natives. I would like to share with you my personal classification of lovely masters into three main types that I so far know of.

⁴ Other being thilashin (သီလရှင် - "lord of ethics") and maethila (မယ်သီလ - "ethical mother").

⁵ This occurred in a transcribed text of Dhamma discourse given by the Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw.

(A) Lovely Masters – The Angels

Although not as many as before, a great number of lovely masters decide to dedicate their life giving a helping hand in a monastery. The decision is theirs, and they can change any time. These lovely masters arrive at a monastery and ask to be accepted as the monastery financier, office worker, cleaning lady, sayadaw's attendant, medical assistant, kitchen worker, often times taking up other duties too, such as ringing the monastery bell (according to a given schedule), arranging and carrying out offerings of meals for monks or/and the monks, keeping eye on the yogis that visit or meditate in the monastery, introduce the visitors to the monastery, and sometimes standing in for (deputizing) the sayadaw – esp. in the official issues. Just like the angels, or noble court-ladies, that are esteemed, indispensable, and helpful in their sphere, although not expected to achieve a material or spiritual progress - these lovely masters, although revered, irreplaceable, influential, and instrumental in the functioning of a monastery, do not have much space for significant progress in Dhamma education (*pariyatti*), nor in meditation (*paṭipatti*), burdened by every-day schedule, difficulties, and issues that they ought help with. It is this very situation that requires the nuns to let go of the precept about using money and take up only the eight precepts.

(B) Lovely Masters – The Scholars

Thanks to the unprecedented support of Htut Khaung Sayadaw (of Sagaing Region), with the famous progenitors such as May Kin (မာယိကန္တ), there has been ever-growing number of lovely masters that live in nunneries and study or teach the Dhamma in accordance with the official Buddhist curriculum. This is the curriculum accepted by government and primarily followed by novices and monks. It was just several decades ago that a large number of lovely masters were awarded the monastic degrees of "Dhammācariya" or PhD. in Buddhist Philosophy. These lovely masters live in their nunneries and undergo a regime (often) harder than the novices do in monasteries – that is because novices and monks are always first in donations of robes, meal, place to stay, and medicine. The governmental law which allows lovely masters to go on alms-round maximum eight times a month (ca. twice a week) forces the nuns to cook and shop themselves – collecting reserves during the alms-round and spending them on the other days. This is another case of nuns who, by the social circumstance, cannot go on without money – and hence have to follow eight precepts only.

(C) Lovely Masters – The Seekers of Truth

Just like such monks and novices, the lovely masters who dedicate their life to meditation are rare, extremely rare. Recently there have emerged a number of monasteries throughout the country of Myanmar, which provide lovely masters with accommodation and all necessary facilities for full-scale meditation retreats and long-term meditation practice. The most famous of them is the famous Pa Auk Tradition, of which monasteries spread all over the country. There is also Panditarama, Thae-Engu, and many other – some of them are in the forest, and some in villages and towns. Interestingly, these lovely masters have evolved into several different "appearances" based on different likes and dislikes of the sayadaws in the respective monasteries, ranging from the color of the robes to number and interpretation of their rules. Officially, however, there are no "schools" of nuns, and when different nuns meet at a same monastery, they live in mutual concord, suspending or paying no attention to their peculiarities. Because of the support these nuns often get in forest and other monasteries, it is not uncommon for them to follow all ten precepts, i.e. avoid accepting and using money.

Obviously, many nuns try to combine two or all three of these features. There are many scholarly lovely masters who help in monasteries, or meditate, and other lovely masters who help in monasteries reserving several hours a day for meditation.

The distinguishing feature of Burmese lovely masters, when compared to the other nuns in other Buddhist countries, is the color of their robes. Unlike the Burmese nuns who wear pink, brown, or black robes, for example the Thai nuns (mae-chi) commonly wear white robes only. The historical records say, that even the Burmese nuns wore first just white robes. Later (based on an event still unknown to me) the under-wear and the upper cloth changed into pink. In the very recent times, on the encouragement of Sayadaw U Janakābhivaṃsa (Mahā Gandhāyone Sayadaw) – perhaps the most respected scholar of modern Myanmar – the remaining parts of a lovely master's robe also changed into pink. This then turned into frenzy for color-change, sometimes progressing into brown or black under the instruction of a confident sayadaw. See below my translation of the main source of this information.

Quote from "ဘိက္ခုနီသာသနာ နှင့် သီလရှင်သမိုင်း" [= Bhikkhunī Sāsana and the history of Thilashins] by ရဝေထွန်း {Yawethun}, fourth edition in 1998 [year of first edition is not known, but from the information inside the book it seems to be around 1965]

"ဦးကျော်လှဟူသည် သံချိုဆရာကြီး မောင်းထောင်ဦးကျော်လှပင် ဖြစ်၏။	"U Kyo-hla is in fact Than-cho master U Kyo-hla from Maung-Thaung.
ထိုဦးကျော်လှ၏ သံချိုကဗျာတို့တွင် သီပေါလက်ထက်တွင်ရေးသော ဦးသူတော်ဟု ခေါင်းတပ်ထားသည့် သံချိုအဆုံးသတ်တွင် -	At the end of the sweet-sound (than-cho) poem called U Thu-Taw (= monastery helper) written in the era of Hsi-Paw (Thi-Paw) by that U Kyo Hla, (is written:)
‘ကျပ်တစ်လုံးငယ်နှင့်၊ ရပ်သုံးဆယ်နဂရံက၊ အတန်တန်ဆန်ခံလို့၊ သီလရှင်ဖြူဖြူလတ်’ ကဲ့ကို၊ ဇရပ်မှာအကြံပြုပါလို့၊	"While staying in a rest house, (he) thought of the bright white precept-nuns, (how they,) with a little basked (of monastery helpers), from the Thoun-Zhay town (Yat-Thoun-Zhay Town) receive rice again and again,
‘အဝတ်ဖြူ-ဖွတ်ယူလိုလှသည့်နှယ်’ အရွယ်တူ မယ်သူ မညရစ်နှင့်၊ ဖိုးသူကပြဲ’ ဟုရေးသားထားခဲ့သည်။	(Then) he forcefully took the white clothes (worn by monastery helpers); do not envy the sisters (precept-nuns) of the same age, dear (/“adult”) monastery helper”, thus (the poem) was written.
ထိုသံချိုကဗျာတွင် သီလရှင်ဖြူဖြူလတ်ဟူ၍လည်းကောင်း၊ သီလရှင်များ အဖြူရောင် ဝတ်ဆင်ကြသည်ကို ထင်ရှားသိသာစေခဲ့၏။	In this Than-cho poem it was very clearly expressed, that the thilashins wear white clothes, also by saying “thilashin of middle years (/age) in white”.
ယခုတိုင် တွင်ကျယ်နေသည့် မယ်သူတော်ဟူသော အရပ်သုံးစကား (ရခိုင်ပြည်တွင် သူတော်မဟူသောအသုံးရှိ၏) ကို ထောက်လျှင်လည်း လက်ရှိဖိုးသူတော်များ အဖြူဝတ်သကဲ့သို့	Even like today the spread usage of term “female monastery helpers” {may-thoo-taw} [there is used the term “female helper” {thoo-taw-ma} in Rakhine state] also helps in the way that (just) like the present(-day's)

	"male monastery helpers" {phoe-thoo-taw} of white cloth,
သီလရှင်ခေါ်သော မယ်သူတော်များသည်လည်း အဖြူဝတ်များပင်ဖြစ်ကြောင်း မငြင်းနိုင်ပေ။	the thilashins (here) called "female monastery helpers" are also only of white clothes, (which is) a fact, that can't be denied.
ထိုစကားနှင့်စပ်၍ ယခု စစ်ကိုင်းတောင်ရိုး သစ်ဆိမ့်ချောင်နာယကဆရာကြီး၏ ပြောဆိုချက်မှာ ကိုးကားလောက်သည်ဟု ထင်ပါသည်။	(I) think, that this is said with regards to words of the present(-day's) leading great-master of Thit-hseint hermitage of the Sagaing hill-range.
သစ်ဆိမ့်ဆရာကြီးသည် လွန်ခဲ့သည့် အနှစ် ၄၀ ကျော်လောက် အချိန် သက်ရွယ်ငယ်နစဉ်က ၎င်းတို့သည် ခါးဝတ်နှင့်အပေါ်ရုံတို့ကိုသာလျှင် မြေနီဆိုး၍ ဝတ်ကြပြီး အကျီကိုမူ အဖြူရောင်သက်သက်ဝတ်ဆင်ကြသည်ဟုဆို၏။	The great master of Thit-hseint says, that around over forty years ago, when (he) was of young age, they would also wear only the underwear and the upper cloth dyed by 'red-soil', (and) as for the shirt, they wore it white unlike (the remaining two cloths).
ထိုစဉ်က စစ်ကိုင်းတောင်ရိုးတွင် သီတင်းသုံးတော်မူသော မဟာဂန္ဓာရုံဆရာတော် (၁၂၅၇ ခုနှစ်မှ ၁၂၈၁ အထိ စစ်ကိုင်းတောင်ရိုး၌ သီတင်းသုံးသည်) ထံသို့ သီလရှင်များ သွားရောက်ကန်တော့ကြရ၏။	At that time, thilashins had to come and pay respect to the Maha-Gandhayoun Sayadaw, who resided in the Sagaing hill-range ((he) resided in Sagaing hills since 1257 until 1281 ME [i.e. 1896-1920 CE]).
ထိုအချိန်၌ သစ်ဆိမ့်ချောင်တွင် ဆရာကြီးဒေါ်ဝဏ္ဏရှိသေး၏။	At that time the nun mistress Wunna was (also) still in the Thit-hseint hermitage.
ထိုသို့သီလရှင်များ သွား၍ကန်တော့သောအခါ မဟာဂန္ဓာရုံဆရာတော်က သီလရှင်တို့၏ အကျီဖြူကိုကြည့်ပြီး "နင်တို့လက်က လူထွက်နေတယ် (လူတ်နှင့်တူနေသည်ဟု ဆိုလိုသည်)၊ အပေါ်ရုံနှင့် အရောင်တူပါစေ"ဟု မိန့်တော်မူလေသည်။	There, when the thilashins went and showed their respect, Maha-Gandhayoun Sayadaw looked at their white shirt and proclaimed: "Your hand is like that of lay people, may it be same as the upper cloth." {The shirt that nuns wore, was white – with long white sleeves. Under it they had a red under-robe and on it they wore a red upper-robe. Thus their hands were white, although the rest of the body was red. (The book apparently does not explain how the lower and upper cloths became red.) Sayadaw said exactly: "Your hand is disrobing. May it (the hand) be same as the upper cloth." - i.e. the white sleeves look like those of lay people – may they be red like the upper cloth.}
ထိုအခါမှစ၍ တစ်စတစ်စ အကျီအဖြူ ပျောက်သွားလေသည်။	Since then little by little the white shirts disappeared.

ဤသို့ သစ်ဆိမ့်ဆရာကြီးက ပြောပြဖူးလေသည်။	This has been already explained by the great-master of Thit-hseint.
ဤစကားကို ထောက်၍ သီလရှင်များ လုံးဝအဖြူရောင် ပျောက်သွားသည်မှာ နှစ်ပေါင်း ၄၀ ခန့်မျှသာ [လွန်ခဲ့သော နှစ် ၃၀ ကျော်က စကား။] ရှိသေးကြောင်း သိသာပေတော့သည်။	Supporting this utterance (of the sayadaw), the thilashins' white color completely disappeared, which is just known to be around forty years ago [i.e. 1940'].
{This means, that the (mass?) change from white to a reddish color of the thilashins' white shirt certainly happened in 40's of 20 th century, and from the text we may think, that the main (if not the only) reason for it was an indirect condemnation of the white by the very respected Maha-Gandhayone Sayadaw.}	
(မြန်မာနှင့် ထေရ်ဒုဒ္ဒဘာသာချင်းလည်းတူယဉ်ကျေးမှုချင်းလည်းတူ၍ ရာဇင်တစ်လျှောက်လုံး အမြဲတမ်းဆက်ဆံခဲ့ရသော ယိုးဒယား၊ ကမ္ဘောဒီးယားနှင့် လောပြည်တို့ရှိ ထေရ်ဒုဒ္ဒဘာသာ သီလရှင်တို့သည် ယခုတိုင် အဖြူရောင်အဝတ်အရုံများဖြင့် ဝတ်ရုံနေထိုင်လျက်ပင် ရှိသေး၏။)	(The thilashins of Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, of which countries the Theravaada Buddhist culture of Myanmar was for whole lineages of kings similar, even today wear and live only in the white color.)

See below more of my notes from that book:

- in Myanmar are the lovely masters mostly regarded as "*paribbājikā*", (a word used in Pāḷi for female non-Buddhist hermits), much mentioned in Pāḷi scriptures. The prototype of Buddhist thilashins may be traced to the time of arrival of Saṅghamittā Therī from India to Sri Lanka, as Asoka's Buddhist missionary. Before she arrived, the royal women of Sri Lanka headed by Anulādevī took white clothes on themselves and lived in a kind of monastery, observing ten precepts (waiting for Saṅghamittā Therī to come and ordain them as female-novices and later as *bhikkhuni*s). This kind of "hermit females" are known in Pāḷi scriptures as "*paṇḍaraṅga-paribbājikā*" – i.e. females gone in homelessness, wearing white clothes, well shaven head and observing eight or more precepts.
- There were lovely masters already in the Pyu period (of old Burma), as we know from the stone inscriptions, but we are not aware of the term used for them. From Chinese historical records we know, that most (if not all) young girls in the Sirikhetta (Pyu) period ordained as lovely masters, although most of them just temporarily.
- Just later in the Inn-Wa period they are recorded as "soppayo" (ဆပယော), which is but a Mon word. This word comes from Pāḷi "*sappurisa*" ("good person") and for the people of Myanmar it indicated that the nuns were pure in ethics.

		
(photo donated by Joah McGee)	(photo donated by Joah McGee)	
		
(photo donated by Tharthanapyu Thet Win Maung)	(photo donated by Joah McGee)	(photo donated by Ma Hsu Yee Mon)

May all beings be happy,
monk Sarana